

Message Text

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PAGE 01 OPORTO 00405 091013Z

53

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00
DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 /054 W
----- 056318

R 071610Z DEC 76

FM AMCONSUL OPORTO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 919

INFO AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMCONSUL PONTA DELGADA

C O N F I D E N T I A L OPORTO 405

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PO

SUBJECT: LOCAL ELECTIONS IN NORTHERN PORTUGAL

1. SUMMARY: THE FOLLOWING IMPRESSIONS ARE DRAWN FROM A SERIES OF MEETINGS AND VISITS RECENTLY CONDUCTED THROUGHOUT THE OPORTO CONSULAR DISTRICT WHERE LOCAL ELECTIONS ON DECEMBER 12 SHOULD BE A FAIR TEST OF STRENGTH BETWEEN THE FOUR PRINCIPAL PARTIES. BEST ESTIMATES ARE THAT THE ELECTIONS WILL DO LITTLE MORE THAN CONFIRM THE STATUS QUO. END SUMMARY.

2. FOUR WAY RACE: LOCAL ELECTIONS IN THE NINE NORTHERN DISTRICTS ARE A COMPETITION BETWEEN SOCIALISTS (PS) , SOCIAL DEMOCRATS (PPD/PSD) , CENTER DEMOCRATS (CDS), AND COMMUNISTS WHO ARE RUNNING ELECTION FRONT (PU) CAMPAIGN. ULTRA-LEFT POPULAR UNITY GROUPS (GDUS) ARE VIRTUALLY NON-EXISTENT IN THE INTERIOR. GDUP'S ARE ONLY CONTESTING URBAN AREAS BUT OTELO'S IMAGE IS FADING FAST. FIRST MAJOR GDUP RALLY DECEMBER 4 IN OPORTO DREW LESS THAN 1000 DESPITE BUSING. GDUP'S HAVE NO CANDIDATES OF ANY PRESTIGE. NORTHERN OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT THE GDUP'S WILL PLAY NO SIGNIFICANT ROLE. NEITHER WILL OTHER SPLINTER PARTIES ON FAR LEFT OR RIGHT WHO WITH TOKEN CANDIDATES IN A FEW AREAS SHOULD DRAW ONLY A HANDFUL OF VOTES.

3. ABSTENTIONS ON THE RISE: INFORMED SOURCES EXPECT A SUBSTANTIAL INCREASE IN ABSTENTIONS FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS:

-- DISSATISFACTION WITH POLITICAL PROCESS

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CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 OPORTO 00405 091013Z

-- HEIGHTENED APATHY AFTER PREVIOUS ELECTIONS

-- SIMPLE IGNORANCE REGARDING IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL ELECTIONS. THERE HAS BEEN A NOTICEABLE DROP IN PARTICIPATION AT POLITICAL RALLIES. WEATHER WILL BE ADDITIONAL FACTOR PARTICULARLY IN RURAL AREAS WHERE ABSTENTION RATE IS ALREADY HIGHER THAN NATIONAL AVERAGE. ABSTENTIONS WILL ADVERSELY AFFECT ALL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES AND WORK TO ADVANTAGE OF COMMUNIST-LED PU. COMMUNISTS SHOULD ALSO GAIN FROM AN ANTICIPATED INCREASE IN VOID BALLOTS RESULTING FROM CONFUSION OVER MORE COMPLICATED VOTING PROCEDURES.

4. FAIR PLAY ELECTIONS: NO PARTY CAN COMPLAIN TO DATE OF ANY HARRASSMENT OR INTIMIDATION IN THE NORTH WHERE ACTS OR THREATS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE HAVE BEEN NONEXISTENT. MINOR SCUFFLING MAY BE INEVITABLE BUT LOCAL AUTHORITIES EVERYWHERE SEEM DETERMINED TO VIGOROUSLY FOLLOW THE RULES OF THE GAME. FOR EXAMPLE, OPORTO CITY WORKERS CHECKED FLAGRANT COMMUNIST POSTER VIOLATIONS NOVEMBER 29 BY CLEANING PU PROPAGANDA OFF DOWNTOWN AREA WALLS. ELECTIONS SHOULD BE FAIR TEST OF VOTER STRENGTH OF EACH OF THE MAJOR FOUR CONTESTANTS.

5. SOCIALIST URBAN STRENGTH: IN APRIL, 1976 ELECTIONS, THE PS REGISTERED LOSSES UP TO 20 PER CENT IN SEVEN OF NINE NORTHERN DISTRICTS. SOCIALISTS SHOULD DO BETTER DECEMBER 12 BARRING LAST-MINUTE DEVELOPMENTS. ANY FURTHER LOSSES ARE EXPECTED TO BE SLIGHT. PS ORGANIZATION, MILITANCY AND MONEY ARE SUPERIOR TO BOTH DEMOCRATIC RIVALS PPD/PSD AND CDS IN ALL NORTHERN MAJOR URBAN AREAS. SOCIALISTS SHOULD EASILY WIN CONTROL OF CITY HALLS IN OPORTO AND COIMBRA WHERE POPULAR FIGURES HEAD THE PS LISTS. THEY SHOULD DO WELL IN SMALLER MUNICIPALITIES WITH LARGE BLUE-COLLAR POPULATIONS SUCH AS BRAGA, GUIMARAES, GAIA AND MATOSINHOS. SOCIALIST CONTROL OF GOVERNMENT IS CONSIDERED ON BALANCE TO BE HELPFUL TO LOCAL PS CAUSE. MOST PORTUGUESE PREFER WINNERS TO UNDERDOGS. COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING NOVEMBER 18 IN OPORTO (AND SUBSEQUENT MINISTERIAL-LEVEL JUNKETS IN THE NORTH) IS FRESH IN THE MINDS OF NORTHERNERS THIRSTING FOR ATTENTION. RESIGNATION OF LOPES CARDOSO ALSO HELPS. VIANA CIVIL GOVERNOR (PS) TOLD ME DECEMBER 1 THAT HE "BREATHES EASIER" WITH CARDOSO OUT.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 OPORTO 00405 091013Z

6. COMMUNIST RECOVERY: AFTER POOR SHOWING IN APRIL, 1976 VOTING, COMMUNISTS ARE EXPECTED TO RECOVER SLIGHTLY IN THE URBAN NORTH. NO ONE IS FOOLED BY POPULAR UNITY(PU) FRONT WHICH IS GETTING ALL CRYPTO-COMMUNISTS AND FELLOW TRAVELERS OUT OF THE WOODWORK. PCP IS WORKING HARD AND APPEARS TO BE CASHING IN ALL IOU'S. NUMBER OF RALLIES AND DEMONSTRATIONS SCHEDULED BY PU IS EQUAL TO COMBINED TOTAL ORGANIZED BY PS, PPD/PSD, AND CDS. WITH ONLY TOKEN OPPOSITION FROM GDUP'S

AND SPLINTER LEFTISTS, PU IS CONCENTRATING ITS FIRE ON THE ALLEGED "ANTI-WORKER" ORIENTATION OF SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT. PU IS EXPECTED TO GAIN FROM CONCENTRATED LEFTIST VOTE AND SOME DISAFFECTED WORKERS WHO FORMERLY VOTED PS. PU WON'T WIN ANY NORTHERN CITY HALLS BUT WILL PLACE A FEW MEMBERS IN URBAN CENTERS LIKE OPORTO AND COIMBRA. SLIGHT PERCENTAGE INCREASE IN PROPORTION OF VOTES CAST WILL GIVE PCP SOMETHING TO CROW ABOUT.

7. PPD/PSD AND CDS RURAL STRENGTH: OBSERVERS EXPECT LOCAL ELECTIONS TO CONFIRM EXISTING STRENGTH OF PPD/PSD AND CDS IN RURAL AREAS AND SMALLER TOWNS IN THE NORTH. COMMUNISTS AND FELLOW TRAVELERS STILL IN CONTROLLING POSITIONS IN SUCH CITIES AS VIANA AND VILA REAL WILL BE REPLACED BY PPD/PSD. CDS SHOULD EASILY WIN IN GUARDA AND REGISTER SOLID ACROSS-THE-BOARD GAINS THROUGHOUT THE NORTH ALBEIT NOT THE QUANTUM JUMP REFLECTED LAST APRIL WHEN THE CDS VOTE ALMOST DOUBLED. PPD/PSD IS PARTICULARLY UNDER THE GUN TO REVERSE LOSSES OF UP TO 30 PER CENT REGISTERED IN ALL NINE NORTHERN DISTRICTS DURING THE APRIL, 1976 ELECTIONS. SA CARNEIRO'S PARTY WILL HAVE TO WORK HARDER DURING THE CLOSING DAYS OF THE CAMPAIGN JUST TO BREAK EVEN. THE CAMPAIGN TO DATE HAS EVIDENCED LITTLE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES EXCEPT IN SOME UNDERPOPULATED PARISHES. PPD/PSD AND CDS CONTINUE TO SUFFER FROM LACK OF FUNDS AND MID-LEVEL CADRES. HOWEVER, IN THE NORTH BOTH PARTIES CAME CLOSE TO THEIR GOAL OF CONTESTING EVERY ELECTORAL BODY WITH SEPARATE LISTS.

8. PROGNOSIS: BARRING UNFORESEEN CIRCUMSTANCES, LOCAL ELECTIONS IN THE NORTH SHOULD CONFIRM THE STATUS QUO. SOCIALISTS MAY DROP SLIGHTLY BUT WILL MAINTAIN URBAN STRENGTH AND CONTROL PORTUGAL'S SECOND LARGEST METROPOLITAN AREA. CDS WILL CONTINUE TO RISE BUT NOT BY SO MUCH. PPD/PSD CANNOT REGAIN LAST APRIL'S

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 OPORTO 00405 091013Z

LOSSES BUT WILL HAVE TO WORK HARD JUST TO BREAK EVEN. THE COMMUNISTS SHOULD GAIN A FEW PERCENTAGE POINTS FOR WANT OF ULTRA-LEFT OPPOSITION AND AIDED BY INCREASED AOSTENTIONS AND INVALID BALLOTS.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS, VISITS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 07 DEC 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976OPORTO00405
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760455-0242
From: OPORTO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761266/aaaacezq.tel
Line Count: 159
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <05 MAY 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <30 AUG 2004 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LOCAL ELECTIONS IN NORTHERN PORTUGAL
TAGS: PINT, PO
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006